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GERMANY IN TRANSITION.

BY ANGLO-AMERICAN.

THERE is no European nation that has altered within a single generation in so many essential qualities as Germany. With the visible tokens of her development every one is familiar. A congeries of petty, disjointed, quarrelsome, half-moribund States was welded thirty-eight years ago by the interdependent processes of war, diplomacy and spoliation into a powerful and united Empire. The white heat of that superb achievement seems to have transmitted itself through every vein and to each extremity of the body politic. The impulse it generated has electrified every form of national endeavor. From St. Petersburg to London the world of European politics, if it does not to-day, as two years ago it unquestionably did, wait expectant upon the German lead, at least revolves, and not always of its own free will, around the German centre. When the Wilhelmstrasse intervenes in any question, that question acquires at once a new seriousness, and the cleverness with which most of Germany's moves are calculated, the suspicions and to a very large extent the ignorance that surround her policy, and the formidable power she can always summon to enforce her decrees, invest her every action with a far-reaching anxiety. The Kaiser holds a position of actual and potential power almost Napoleonic in its range and effectiveness. He is the head of the greatest and most scientific army in Europe and perhaps in the world. His navy is an instrument of admirable potency, fashioned with the microscopic carefulness that in 1870 made Germany invincible on land. He is bidding with unexampled boldness, and, what is far more pertinent, with unexampled success for that dual supremacy of military and naval power which all the authorities have told us is beyond the material competency of any one nation. The State organization

at his disposal is assuredly the most efficient and the most intelligent in Europe. Nor is it only in administrative perfection and material resources that the Kaiser is strong. He is strong, too, in the character and qualities of the people over whom he rules, a virile, supremely capable nation, thrilled with the consciousness of being on the crest of the rising wave and looking forward to the future with an almost defiant assurance of success. Sixty-two million Germans, organized into a State that lies round the very heart of Europe, are not, unless the world has egregiously misread them, the people to feed or flatter the complacent opinion that the epic phases of history are over and done with and that all national ambitions on the old devastating scale have exhausted themselves. Putting the Japanese on one side, of whom I cannot speak from personal knowledge, I should say that no more thorough, energetic and disciplined nation exists on this earth to-day.

How have unity, prosperity and Imperialism, which have so suddenly descended upon a country devoted to plain living and high thinking, affected its spirit, its moral fibre, its conception of life? That there has been a change and a deep one the very stones of Berlin cry aloud. The great city on the banks of the Spree, a generation ago little more than a placid village, is to-day a strident metropolis, whose whole style of existence marks the vastness of the distance that Germany has travelled in the last forty years. There may be plenty of high thinking done in the capital—done by men whose salaries, worldliness and activities make the old type of German professor seem an impossible anachronism—but it is certainly no longer a city of conspicuously plain living. The rents are such as to open even a Londoner's eyes, household expenses are proportionately severe, and the clubs, the theatres and, above all, the hotels and restaurants, point in a direction that does not lead by any means to economy. There are hotels to-day in Berlin that are little, if at all, behind the best of those in New York. True, they are not built for, and possibly are not greatly patronized by, the Berliners themselves, to whom the *café* is still the choicest and most popular resort, but their mere presence suggests an emphatic change from the old ways. Berlin is as much an affair of our own time as Chicago. Its past is so overlaid by the raucous and insistent present that the most pertinacious search can hardly disinter it

or the most visualizing imagination recall it. It is a triumph of mechanics and little more. One feels the lack of a background; one is conscious of no historical evolution. True, the labor of building it has been far more dexterously hidden than is the case with most American cities. It escapes the deadly uniformity, the prosaic rectangular precision, the dreadful air of having been hit off at a stroke and dumped down by contract, that characterize New York. The streets have curves, are spacious, shaded with avenues of trees, faultlessly asphalted, and clean with a cleanliness surpassing that of Paris. The white buildings, the crystalline air, the uniforms and the eternal salute, the overwhelming intonations of a planned, ordered, thought-out scheme, combine to produce an effect of which I can say no more and no less than that it is handsome. The architecture, to be sure, is riotously, exuberantly florid, but, for all that, a drive from the Unter den Linden to Charlottenburg will take one past a succession of finer, or at any rate more imposing, houses than either London or New York can show in such serried profusion. As for the official architecture, it is under the Kaiser's personal and directing patronage and therefore beyond criticism. But if Berlin just rises above imparting to one the American impression of a gigantic counter, it fails altogether to convey the London or Parisian effect of cosmopolitanism. The essence of cosmopolitanism I take to be a mellow something in the social air, a spreading spirit of the tolerance that comes from experience, of easy-goingness, of assured standards, of wide and quiet intellectual interests. But that is anything but the "note" of Berlin, where Court and officialdom only serve to put a little gilding on a life full of crudeness and materialism, where the military caste dominates everything, where society is furiously, spitefully sectional, and where, except for a bounteous supply of cheap and good music, there is hardly anything to alleviate the stridency of a rather mean and arrogant utilitarianism. Berlin, if not cosmopolitan in itself, stands near enough to the cosmopolitan whirlpool to be sprayed by the scum. It flaunts a coarseness of depravity that is not, I think, equalled anywhere. Pornographic literature of the most revolting and debasing character is becoming there as great an evil as it ever was in Paris. In no European capital do the standards in matters of taste and art and the minor embellishments of life rule so low. Berlin is a parvenu city, given

over to money - getting, "pleasure," extravagance and officialdom.

In these and many other ways the new Berlin symbolizes, though in an exaggerated form, the new Germany, a Germany that has turned her back on much that was once her chief glory to plunge after material and convertible success. There has been a change of national front, a revolution and a lowering of the national ideals. That intellectual cosmopolitanism which used to be one of the most admirable and seductive of German traits has vanished along with the dazzling succession of authors, scientists and philosophers who were its embodiment and the unworldly professors who fostered and perpetuated it. There is little "heat of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming" in the Germany of to-day. The idealism and love of science and knowledge for their own sakes that marked the *ante-bellum* generation and constituted the nation's high, austere and distinctive claim to honor and influence, have been replaced by a bald and repellent utilitarianism. A new luxury, restlessness, discontent and chauvinism have invaded all classes. Modern Germany, pursuing wealth with an almost American ardor, has cultivated with assiduity and not without success the amenities and what Burke called "the solemn plausibilities" of life, has become more polished, more ceremonious, more preoccupied with the small niceties and embellishments of social intercourse; but has lost, or is rapidly losing, the old simplicity and purity of manners. The fact and the significance of this transformation are the themes of ceaseless threnodies in Germany herself and the starting-point of nearly all the innumerable foreign writers who have made her evolution their study. The latest of them, Mr. W. H. Dawson, says:

"A new spirit has entered into the national life. If the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed in Germany the reign of spirit, of ideas, the second half witnessed the reign of matter, of things, and it is this latter sovereignty which is supreme to-day. A century ago Germany was poor in substance but rich in ideals; to-day it is rich in substance, but the old ideals, or at least the old idealism, has gone. . . . For the present the assertion of modern Germanism is the assertion of material force, and it remains yet to be seen whether behind that assertion of force there is a spiritual influence that will permeate society and so become a permanent factor in civilization. We know what old Germany gave to the world, and for the gift the world will ever be grateful;

we do not know what modern Germany, the Germany of the overflowing barns and the full argosies, has to offer beyond its materialistic science and its merchandise, or whether the later gift will be of a kind to call for either thankfulness or admiration."

Given the external revolution—the mastery of the German Confederation, the war with France and the unity of the Empire—the internal revolution had, of course, to come if what had been won was to be held, developed and made the jumping-off ground for future triumphs. It is the *Zeitgeist* that is answerable for it at least as much as the German people. One may lament the completeness of the supersession of the old Germany, but it is more instructive to trace out its symptoms and consequences. They are sufficiently abundant, and I do not aim at enumerating more than a few of them. Education, to begin with, has been thoroughly materialized. A hundred years ago speculative philosophy and the humanities were in the ascendant; to-day their place is taken by natural science bound to the service of commerce and the "practical" professions. The hope of a harmonious balance between the economic and the moral side of German development is being steadily sacrificed. "A great number of students at German universities," says Professor Friedrich Paulsen, "no longer come in contact with philosophy at all, and a deplorable lack of familiarity with the ultimate problems of existence and life is, accordingly, to be found amongst the educated classes, even amongst those who have received an academical education. Vague scepticism, materialism of the most superficial description, eclecticism void of any philosophical principles, uncritical submission to every latest craze in the garb of philosophy—these are the consequences of the disappearance of philosophy and its clarifying influence from the school." And they in their turn encourage the subordination of everything to the knowledge that pays; encourage, too, a flightiness and superficiality of mind that threatens the overthrow of the traditional German culture. Mr. Wolf von Schierbrand even declares that from a pre-eminently reading nation the Germans are becoming the very reverse. "Whole strata of German society," he says, "have begun to affect, or to really feel, a deep contempt for books, for book learning and for all that books can teach." His volume, "Germany," bears repeated witness to the effects upon the German people of their rush into city life just at

a time when they are losing their spiritual faith in theories of moral restraint. Crimes against property and morality have multiplied in Germany in the last thirty years with an appalling rapidity, and financial juggleries have kept pace with them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find men who will enter the Church. Even the Government service barely holds its own against the attractions and rewards of a commercial career. The best business brains of the country are no longer to be found in the bureaucracy. "Men of wealth now occupy a different position in popular estimation from that formerly held. The German public is as much interested in their millionaires and industrial dynasties as Americans are in theirs. Luxury is everywhere apparent—in the stores and shops, in the display of fine clothes and jewelry, at social gatherings, in the appointments of houses, exteriorly and interiorly. Fine palaces are reared by the wealthy merchants and manufacturers in the large cities and towns, and beautiful country residences in the fashionable suburbs, with spacious grounds adjoining." Prince Bülow recently lamented the disappearance of the old German frugality:

"I will speak plainly—I say that we are living in an age of luxury, and in an age which overrates the value and importance of material enjoyment, which must inspire with serious anxiety every one of us who has at heart the true civilization of the mind and spirit of the nation, which is its highest welfare. All of us must in all respects return to a more economical mode of life and to a greater simplicity. Yes, all of us; I make no exception. Simplicity of life is more honorable and more meritorious, and it suits us Germans of all nations better than the life we are now leading."

Among the tokens that are calculated, in the Chancellor's words, to inspire "serious anxiety," is the fact, always an unhealthy fact, that the marriage age among the higher classes grows later and later. The number of unmarried women of a marriageable age—estimated at considerably over two millions—and the great increase in divorces emphasize a growing social unsoundness; and the many scandals of recent years among the aristocracy, which is always and in all countries the first class to show the taint of corruption, point to an unmistakable decline in the standards of national morals. The revelations of the successive trials that sprang from Herr Harden's attacks upon the court camarilla were symptoms—extreme and untypical symp-

toms, it is true, but still symptoms—of a real and pervasive deterioration. In a vivid and brilliant, almost too brilliant, chapter in his book on “England and Germany,” Mr. Austin Harrison has tracked the flood of German materialism through a multitude of channels, and is undoubtedly right in finding in it the real driving power and the special characteristic of practically all German activity in practically all spheres of work and thought. “For the time being,” he says, “it has paralyzed the simple and contemplative life of Old Germany, and driven the fine arts and the finer shades of thought and life into the cob-webbed corners of antiquity. With the exception of the Catholic population, I imagine Germany to be the most free-thinking nation on religious matters in all Europe, and the country certainly containing the smallest number of churches and ecclesiastical dignitaries. . . . The whole tenor of German life, from one of sentiment and idealism, has become engrained with materialism, scepticism and what may be termed selfish and national actualities. Germans are the most matter-of-fact, candid, fact-seeking people now living, perhaps the most coarse living, certainly the most material thinking and acting; and this itching love of knowing and discovering is discernible not only in life and act and conversation, but is reflected in art, on the stage, in music, in literature and in religion, and finds expression in perverse curiosity.”

In nothing, perhaps, is the change from the old to the new in Germany more manifest than in the revolution which has overtaken the position and outlook of women. The days of their subjection are drawing rapidly to an end, though to an Englishman or an American, conscious of his own and of all masculine demerits, their submissiveness in their home life is still almost an embarrassment. But after a terrific struggle they have carried their claim to a full educational equality with men; they have forced a way into many professions and trades hitherto barred to them; they overrun the lower grades of the Government and municipal service; and they are yearly making themselves more felt on social and political questions. In a country where there are more women than men, and over two million spinsters, the hearth and home theory of the scope of feminine interests and activities was bound sooner or later to break down. The Kaiser when he declared that Church, kitchen and children were

the woman's true sphere summed up the views of the average German man. The German woman, compelled thereto, in the first instance, by sheer economic necessity, thinks otherwise. The modern Gretchen refuses to be "the aproned caterpillar of man." She has her own clubs, her own vocations, her own life and individuality, and she insists on making the most of them. Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick, the author of that eminently wise, witty and revealing book, "Home Life in Germany"—the best book on German life that has yet been written in the English language—warns us not to take the emancipated *Backfisch* too seriously or to regard her as typical of all German women. But she is at least a new and very interesting phenomenon. The woman movement in Germany, indeed, probably as the result of long centuries of feminine suppression, is in some directions more "advanced" than in any other country; and its literature suggests anything but a trammelled and conventional view of life and of women's place in it. Mrs. Sidgwick says:

"It makes one open one's eyes to go to Germany to-day with one's old-fashioned ideas of the German Frau, and hear what she is doing in her desire to reform society and inaugurate a new code of morals. She does not even wait till she is married to speak with authority. On the contrary, she says that marriage is degrading, and that temporary unions are more to the honor and profit of women. . . . A German lady of wide views and worldly knowledge told me a girl had lately sent her a little volume of original poems that she could only describe as unfit for publication; yet she knew the girl and thought her a harmless creature. She was presumably a goose who wanted to cackle in chorus. . . . One of these immoderates, on the authority of Plato, recommended at a public meeting that girls should do gymnastics unclothed. Some of them are men-haters, some in the interests of their sex are all for free love. None of them accept the domination of men in theory, so I think that the facts of life in their own country must often be unpleasantly forced on them. I discussed the movement, which is a marked one in Germany at present, with two women whose experience and good sense made their opinion valuable. But they did not agree. One said that the excesses of these people were the outcome of long repression and would wear out in time. The other thought the movement would go on and grow; which was as much as to say she thought the old morals were dead. Undoubtedly they are dead in some sets in Germany to-day. You hear of girls of good family who have asserted their 'right to motherhood' without marriage; and you hear of other girls who refuse to marry because they will not make vows or accept conditions they consider humiliating. These views do not attract large numbers; probably never will. But they are sufficiently wide-spread to express

themselves in many modern essays, novels and pamphlets, and even to support several magazines."

There can be no question that the *Backfisch* of to-day who reads Maupassant, Gautier, Nietzsche and what not, who has seen "Salome" as a play and heard "Salome" as an opera, who regards Shaw's "Mrs. Warren's Profession" and Wedekind's "Spring's Awakening" as improving as well as "psychologically interesting" productions, and who looks back upon Gretchen, in Mr. Austin Harrison's words, "as we look back on the fainting virgins of the Early Victorian era," is an altogether novel development. I do not exaggerate her importance or believe very strongly in her permanence, any more than I regard the curious and painful epidemic of suicides among German children as a normal and static feature of German evolution. These and all the other phenomena on which I have touched are the tokens, no doubt, of a change which is also a descent. But to talk of the Germans as decadent is ridiculous to those who know them. No decadent people has ever increased at the rate of a million souls a year while at the same time reducing the rate of mortality. The foundations and structure of the nation are still in the main sound, though not so sound as they were, and German life and character still retain most of their old vigorous purity, hardihood and placidity. In applied intelligence, in discipline, concentration, the capacity for taking pains and research, the Germans are still the foremost of living peoples. But there has been a change and a change that in spite of periodic reactions will certainly continue. The age of German Stoicism has passed; that of German Epicureanism has begun. We may, and probably shall, see before long a healthy revulsion, a revival of the pristine spirituality, an effort of the Grecian side of Germany to assert itself against the predominance of the Roman side. Meanwhile Germany continues in a phase, a disquieting and unpleasant phase, of social and moral transition.

But it is not alone in the sphere of social life and morals that an observer comes across the signs of a sweeping revolution. Looked at broadly, Germany is seen to be trying to solve three distinct but intimately related problems. The first is to become a great naval, commercial and colonial Power. The second is to adjust her domestic policy to the fact that every year finds her passing more and more decidedly from a mainly agricultural to

a mainly industrial State. The third is to establish a working compromise between universal suffrage on the one hand and the fact, in recent months the somewhat glaring fact, of semi-autocratic, personal rulership on the other. Of these three problems the first may be said to be in a fair way to solution. That is to say, all Germany and all the responsible and effective parties in Germany have now set the seal of national approval upon the policy of Imperialism in all its many forms. In the *bloc*, for instance, which at present supports Prince Bülow there are Agrarians and Protectionists, Free-Traders and Free-thinkers, Tories and Radicals. They differ on more than one point of domestic policy, but on the question of *Weltpolitik* they are substantially at one, the Radicals supporting a big Navy, an overpowering Army and colonial expansion as heartily as the Conservatives or the National Liberals or the Kaiser himself. The Social Democrats alone consistently oppose the gospel of Imperialism, but their opposition is largely a matter of form and accident; their power is for the moment in eclipse, and will never, in my judgment, be strong enough to restrain the deep-seated instinct towards naval, colonial and commercial Empire. For all practical purposes the ideal of a Greater Germany and of the manifold activities and ambitions it comprises must now be accepted as imbedded in the will and consciousness of the German people. In little more than a generation world-wide interests have been enrolled among the intimate concerns of a people that, except intellectually, used rarely to look beyond its own borders. That Germany has quite accommodated herself spiritually to the greatness of her new position it would be too much to say. The "touchiness," the self-assertion and the grotesque habit of suspiciousness which all too frequently mark the temper of the German people in their international dealings are the tokens of a certain immaturity, of a latent discomfort and overconsciousness in the wearing of the purple of Empire. The Germans have not yet quite reached the point of taking their importance for granted. They have not yet quite outgrown the puerile propensity to call attention to their new dignities and strength with an emphasis sometimes boisterous and not infrequently offensive. That, too, is a sign of transition.

The second of the three problems I have mentioned—that of devising an equitable, political and economic balance between the

interests of industry and of agriculture—is one that grows in contentiousness with every year that passes. It is over a decade and a half since Caprivi declared that Germany was “no longer an agricultural, but an industrial State.” The fact was scarcely arguable even then; it is indisputable now; and with her increasing population, her growing dependence upon foreign food-supplies, and her vast expansion of manufactures, it will soon be accepted by all Germany as axiomatic. But it is a fact which the organized obstinacy of the Agrarians has hitherto kept from any adequate translation into terms of politics. A new economic order has arisen, but the policy of the State has not yet been adjusted to it. Preponderantly industrial as she is, Germany is still for the greater part ruled in the interests of agriculture; and to reduce the ascendancy of the Agrarians to legitimate proportions is one of the most anxious tasks that lie ahead of the country. A great and complex fight is on for the control of Germany’s economic development, and it is in that light that the present crisis in the Imperial finances and the measures proposed for its solution take on their true significance. From 1879 till to-day it is the Agrarians who have really dictated the fiscal policy of the Empire. It was they who overthrew Caprivi. It was their Bourse law of 1896, forbidding all dealings in “futures” of whatever kind—a law recently modified to permit of transactions in futures of mining and industrial stocks, but not in corn or mill products—that has been one of the chief causes of the exodus of German capital, the high German bank rate and the instability of the German money market. Every commercial treaty they have fought and whittled down with all the weapons of political terrorism. It was their opposition that defeated the great schemes of canal development, just as it was their pressure that led to the restrictions upon the importation of live-stock, the premiums granted to sugar-producers, and the progressive increase in the corn duties. They have, in short, pursued their own interests with a total blindness to the interests of all other classes and with a success that will come to be looked back upon as one of the miracles of modern politics. The measure of German discontent, of class bitterness and of the growth of Social Democracy is very largely the measure of Agrarian ascendancy. They have been able so far to hold their own and to impose their wishes on Chancellor after Chancellor because

of the immense desirability in all countries, but in a military country especially, of keeping the peasantry on the soil; because of the many strong links of social and political sympathy that have always united the nobility and the Crown; and because the Conservatives and the Agrarians were for a long while the only, or at least the most conspicuous, advocates of naval and colonial expansion. They sought and achieved Protection through Imperialism; the tariff was their stipulated reward for subscribing to *Weltpolitik*. Now, however, that Imperialism has ceased to be a Tory and Agrarian monopoly, the struggle between the industrial and the land-owning interests is destined to develop a yet sharper intensity. On its issue will largely depend whether the German invasion of foreign markets is to expand or contract.

With the final token of the present transitional stage in Germany's development—the gathering resolve to shackle the personal régime, to make Government responsible as well as representative, and to do away with the obsolete electoral system that in Prussia both stifles and perverts the popular will—I have left myself little space to deal. Liberalism in Germany is gaining ground year by year, but whether the people as a whole are as yet really desirous of Parliamentary Government or sufficiently experienced to work it is another and more doubtful question. We must remember that politically the Germans are still in the pupil stage, that the German lines of division are social rather than political, and that while they may chafe under the abuses or blunders of the personal régime any concrete proposal to abolish it, to curtail the Constitutional prerogatives of the Crown, and to make Ministers responsible to the Reichstag instead of to the Emperor would rouse immense and, in my belief, decisive opposition. Nevertheless, the trend of the German mind is unquestionably in the direction of giving the people an increasingly effective control over national and Imperial policy, and of modifying the present system of one-man power, if not by direct enactment, then by one of those tacit compromises and informal understandings that regulate the workings of British Constitutionalism. Some day the issue between Crown and People will be definitely joined. So far it has been merely broached. But that it should be raised at all is, perhaps, the most interesting fact about Germany in transition.